

Lillian and Earl Carter House
South side of Georgia Route 280 between
Walters and Thomas streets
Plains
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2207

HABS
GA,
131-PLAIN,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LILLIAN AND EARL CARTER HOUSE

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131-PLAINS,
4-

Location: South side of Georgia Route 280 between Walters and Thomas streets, Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: Zone 16, E 745855 N 346925.

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. James Earl Carter Jr.

Present Occupant/Use: Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter's Plains Office.

Significance: Lillian and Earl Carter moved into this house in 1947 and lived here until Earl Carter's death in 1953. After Lillian Carter died in 1983, the home was retained by the Carter's and is used as their office.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1948-49.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Records are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

1946 Deed January 15, 1946 recorded January 16, 1946. Deed Book 32, page 72. Mamie McDonald to James Earl Carter.

1984 Deed January 5, 1984, recorded January 20, 1984. Deed Book 208, page 88. James E. Carter Jr. as executor of the estate of James E. Carter Sr. to James E. Carter Jr. for \$1.00.
3. Builder, suppliers: Leroy Nix, a Plains resident, was the construction foreman. He worked at the electric Plant in Plains and had formerly worked on the Panama Canal. All of the timber for the house came from the Carter farms in Webster County.¹
4. Original plans and construction: None have been located.
5. Alterations and additions: The original slate roof was replaced with composite asphalt shingles.

¹ Gloria Carter Spann, 1989 interview.

- B. Historical Context: Soon after Jimmy Carter left home to attend the U.S. Naval Academy, Lillian and Earl Carter left the Archery farm and moved into this house built for them in Plains. The house was constructed by local laborers, using locally manufactured bricks and timber cut from the Carter farms in Webster County. Daughter, Gloria Carter Spann, said the family did not want an ostentatious house, so the second story is only visible from the back. The house is also built on a small scale with a low second-story ceiling and doorframes 6' tall. Gloria said the house was built this way expressly for the Carter family, which had no members taller than 6'.

It was an adjustment for Gloria, then in her 20s, and Billy, a teenager, moving from the country into town. Gloria remembers watching Earl drive past the house after work on the road to Archery, then waiting for him to turn back around when he finally remembered that he had moved. The master bedroom was the southeast room on the first floor where the secretary now has an office. Billy lived in the house until he graduated from high school and joined the U.S. Marine Corps, and his bedroom was on the second floor on the south side of the hall. Gloria only lived in the house for a year before she moved out; she slept in the second-floor bedroom on the east side. Her bedroom opened onto a porch over the porte cochere, and she remembers sitting up there with dates and friends from school. The Carters had one of the first television sets in Plains, and it was placed near the picture window in the living room. The slate roof had to be replaced after the Carters bought the TV because the workmen broke many of the shingles when they installed the antenna.²

After Earl Carter died in 1953, Lillian kept the house but did not spend much time there. She moved to Athens, Georgia, and served as a housemother for a fraternity at the University of Georgia. She also supervised a nursing home in Blakely, Georgia, in the mid 1960s. In 1966, at 68, Lillian joined the Peace Corps and served for two years in India. While she was gone, her children built a new house for her at the site of the old Pond House near Archery (see HABS No. GA-2204). When she tired of the media and tourist invasion of Plains during Jimmy Carter's presidency, she moved to the Pond House and lived there until her death in 1983.³

Jimmy began renting the house in Plains from his mother in 1980 and finally purchased it from the estate of his father in 1984. It is now used as an office staffed by Madeline Edwards, Rosalynn Carter's personal assistant since Jimmy was governor of Georgia, and Crystal Williams. While most of Rosalynn Carter's affairs are managed from this office, the majority of Jimmy's business is attended to from his Atlanta office.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

² Spann, 1989 interview.

³ Spann, 1989 interview.

1. Architectural character: This mid twentieth-century dwelling is distinguished by vernacular English Tudor features, such as an irregular gabled roofline and decorative brickwork.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This asymmetrical house, approximately 68' long, has a rectangular plan and a second story over the east portion. The front, or north, facade has five bays, the third bay consists of an 18' gable-end, projecting 1' from main facade. The fifth bay extends 24' and is recessed 2'-6" from the rest of the block. The 24'-8" west facade is a single bay and the southernmost quarter consists of the back porch under the south slope of the roof. The south facade has six bays, the first three consisting of the back porch, the last three including both first- and second-story windows. A porte cochere spans most of the 27'-2", two-bay east facade.
2. Foundations: Brick with rectangular vents at the groundline.
3. Walls: Common bond, vertically-scored, grooved brick with flush mortar joints.
4. Structural System, framing: Wood frame.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, porte cocheres: An approximately 6' x 24' screened porch under the southwest corner of the south slope of the roof runs the entire length of the south wall of the living room. Three brick piers support the roof. A 20'-0" x 18'-10" porte cochere spans most of the east facade. It has a flat roof supported on three brick piers on the east side and three corresponding brick pilasters on the east wall of the house. On the east side of the porte cochere, the piers spring from a 1'-3" brick wall with concrete coping. A rounded brick stoop with three risers leads to the front door, and a concrete stoop with three steps leads to the door on the east side under the porte cochere. Three brick steps lead to the back porch.
6. Chimneys: A large, internal, rectangular brick chimney located slightly west of the front door serves a fireplace on the east wall of the large living room. A smaller, interior square stack located east of the east gable vents exhaust from the kitchen stove.
7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The front six-panel door is located in the fourth bay of the facade, which is recessed 1' from the gable end to the east. Over the door is a soldier course under a rowlock arch supported on corbels. The wall above the door is patterned brick. There are two six-light, three-cross panel doors with soldier-course lintels on the second bay of the east facade; one leads from the second floor onto the flat roof of the porte cochere; the other is directly beneath, under the porte cochere. On the south facade, a flush hollow-core door leads to the basement and a fifteen-light door leads from the living room to the screened-in porch. This door also has a lintel consisting of two courses of rowlocks; a single course of rowlocks forms the sill. Leading from the porch to the back yard is a wood screen door.
- b. Windows and shutters: The north facade features two large picture windows centered under each of the gable ends. In the gable end that makes up the third bay, a large eight-over-eight-light window is flanked by two four-over-four-light windows. These three double-hung sash share a sill and lintel consisting of a course of rowlocks. Under the gable in the fifth bay is a fixed square window flanked by two four-light casement windows with a double course of rowlocks as a sill. Also on the north facade is a small eight-over-eight-light window in the first bay over the kitchen sink, and a six-over-six-light window in the second bay. Both of these are wood double-hung sash with rowlock sills and lintels. On the west facade is a double window consisting of two six-over-six-light, double-hung sash with a rowlock lintel and sill. All windows on the north and west facades have cream-colored, louvered shutters. Flanking the fifteen-light door leading from the living room to the porch are two fifteen-light windows of equal height to the door. Two rows of headers form pilasters between the doors and windows, and a double row of rowlocks above and a single row beneath form a lintel and sill for the composition. The east portion of the south facade has windows on two stories with each of the three bays having identical windows on the first and second story. In the first bay the windows are paired, in the second, they are small, bathroom windows and in the third they are single and full sized. All of the windows in this section are six-over-six-light with rowlock sills and lintels. There is an additional three-light window below the ground level in the stairwell leading to the basement on the east side of the facade. There are also six-over-six-light, double-hung sash on the first and second stories of the first bay of the east facade. All windows, except for those on the screened porch and the fixed window, have screens in wood frames.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The irregularly shaped asbestos-shingled roof has two cross gables on the north slope. The south side is divided into two sections with differing slopes; a shallower slope on the east section allows for the windows of the second-story rooms, and a steeper slope on the west extends lower than the front side to shelter the back porch. A flat gravel-covered roof shelters the porte cochere.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The shallow eaves are boxed and have bed moldings. A metal gutter runs along the cornice. The eave on the west side of the south slope over the second story has decorative brackets.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The front door opens into a square vestibule with three doorways; the door on the west leads to a large office with a screened-in porch that occupies the entire length of the south wall, the doorway to the south leads to the stairwell to the second floor, and the doorway to the east leads to another smaller office/reception area. A door on the south wall of the reception area leads to a hall running east with two offices on the south with a bathroom in between. The kitchen is in the northeast corner of the first floor.
 - b. Second floor: The partial second floor consists of a hall running west to east from the stairwell, with a bedroom on the south side and another running the length of the east wall with a bathroom in between. A door on the north wall of the hall leads to the unfinished attic over the rest of the house, which is used for storage.
2. Stairways: The stairway to the second floor is located just inside the front door. Eight risers go south to a small landing and seven more risers go east to the second floor.
 3. Flooring: Wood joist floors throughout are covered with beige wall-to-wall carpeting; the kitchen and bath are tile, and the back porch is terra-cotta tile.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are tongue-and-groove natural wood

paneling in the bedrooms, hallways, and offices. The kitchen and bathroom walls have a tile wainscoting. Ceilings are paneled similarly, but are painted white.

5. Doorways and doors: The three doorways leading from the front vestibule are segmentally arched hollow-core doors in arched door frames. Six-panel doors lead to the offices on the south wall, and a swinging six-panel door leads from the reception area to the hall. Second-floor doors are 6' tall. Six-panel doors lead to the bedrooms, closets and the unfinished attic. A narrow three-panel door leads to a linen closet between the south bedroom and the bathroom.
6. Decorative features and trim: There are decorative crown moldings in the offices, hallways and bedrooms. The east wall of the west office has built-in bookshelves and the mantelpiece over the fireplace on the east wall has decorative wood paneling.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: There is a central heat and air-conditioning pump. An attic fan was recently installed. Round louvered ventilator windows are located in both north-facing gable ends, and a square louvered window is under the gable on the west facade.
 - b. Lighting: The kitchen and offices have strip fluorescent lights. Upstairs rooms and bathrooms have ceiling fixtures. Closets have ceiling fixtures that automatically turn on when the doors are opened.
 - c. Plumbing: There are bathrooms on the first and second floors, each containing a sink, toilet, and tub. The kitchen has a double sink.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces north onto a busy street in the middle of town and has a curb cut and gravel drive. A large yard surrounds the house and a brick fence runs along the property boundaries on the east, west, and south.
2. Historic landscape design: Behind the fence, the Carters had a large garden that extended back to the railroad tracks. It was tended by a man the children referred to as Uncle Charlie. They also had several fruit trees in the back yard and porch furniture on the lawn.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: None have been located.
- B. Early Views: U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service Aerial photographs: 3-25-48; 3-28-53.
- C. Interviews:

Madeline Edwards and Crystal Williams, secretaries at the office, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 7, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

Gloria Carter Spann, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 23, 1989, Plains, Georgia.
- D. Bibliography: Primary and unpublished sources: Deeds are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

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